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JAPAN: FROM PETTY KINGDOM TO BUDDHA LAND

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This article endeavours to explore some characteristics of the world view held by the Buddhist elite of Japan during medieval times. It distinguishes between a geographical and a cosmographical level, but also indicates how closely linked both were.

Continental culture offered the Japanese two different contexts: a secular one, based on the Chinese world view, in particular China-centered geography, and a religious one, embedded in the Buddhist Scriptures. The latter was much bigger in scope and time-span, and amounted to an elaborate cosmology. Making reference to the imported world-views the Japanese positioned themselves within this wider context. In medieval Japanese writings we often come across the term *henchi zokusan* or *zokusan hendo*, *petty kingdom*, denoting Japan. This idea is furthermore often associated with the *Mappō* idea. The age of *Mappō*, viz. the degenerate Dharma, was to set in two thousand years after Buddha's Parinirvāṇa. The combination of being born in an age of degeneration and in a peripheral land was the worst possible scenario for someone who would aspire to reach liberation.

Gradually, however, the Japanese start to reappraise their small country. Although it is admittedly small, it enjoys the protection of the *Kami*, the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. The idea of *henchi zokusan* was consequently substituted by the idea of *Sangoku* (*Tenjiku*, *Shintan* and *Honchō*), literally *three countries*, meaning India, China and Japan. This idea of *Sangoku* redeemed Japan from its miserable position on the periphery.

The rivalry between the proponents of Amidism and the older sects seems to reflect a different appraisal of "this world" and "the other world". Surely, one could turn to another universe, in particular to the Western Paradise, where Amida resides, and set all one's hopes on rebirth in that universe, but some Nara monks looked for something closer to home. There were a few alternatives, that were not as remote from this world as Amida's paradise. There was Śākyamuni who had indeed entered nirvāṇa, but had at least left us his teachings and his relics. There was the future Buddha, Maitreya, who was readying himself for his final rebirth. And there was Avalokiteśvara, who resided in a realm which was the first gate to the Western Paradise, but much closer to our world. Nichiren, however, is much more radical in asserting the pre-eminence of Śākyamuni over Amida. He identified himself with Jōgyō Bosatsu, and promoted Japan to the chosen place from where he would save all living beings.

Keywords: BUDDHISM, JAPAN, WORLD VIEW, GEOGRAPHY, AMIDISM, NENBUTSU, MAPPŌ, HŌNEN, JŌKEI, NICHIREN.

If we are allowed to understand the Shintō myths as a reflection of the primitive world view of the Japanese, we may assume that the Japanese had hardly any awareness of a wider geographical context beyond Japan. To the primitive inhabitant, Japan was the world. And, although there was a plain of Heaven and an

underworld, he was not much involved with these realms and certainly did not postulate the existence of other, parallel, universes either.

All this was to change with the advent of continental culture. Especially Buddhism prompted the Japanese to view themselves from the perspective of "self" and "other", in other words to place themselves in a greater context. In fact, the amalgam of continental culture offered them two different contexts. First, there was a secular one, based on the Chinese world view, in particular Chinese geography which divided the world in terms of the antinomy of the Han people and its civilization versus the rest of the known world, called the "four barbarians". The other was a religious one, embedded in the Buddhist Scriptures. This was much bigger in scope and time-span, and amounted to an elaborate cosmology. Although it was ultimately based on a set of ideas conceived and elaborated in India, during medieval times it appears to have exerted a much stronger influence on the Japanese mind than the Chinese world view.

The traditional Indian world view

What was the traditional Indian world view? We find references to it in many Buddhist scriptures and details vary according to the source. One of the most systematic expositions is to be found in the Abhidharmakośa (Jap. *Abidatsuma kusharon*)¹. Basing ourselves on this and a few other sources, we will give a very rough outline of the Indian (Buddhist) world view. The world is thought of as a horizontal disc, in the centre of which is the gigantic Mount *Sumeru*. The Mountain is surrounded by eight concentric mountain ranges, separated by eight seas (*kusen hakkai*). On the outer ocean we find the four continents. The outer ocean itself is bordered by the Iron Mountain Range (*Techirin'isen*). The continent to the south of Mount Sumeru is called *Jambudvīpa*, in Japanese *Enbudai* or *Senbushū*. There are 16 big countries, 500 medium size countries and 100,000 small countries on the continent. The inhabitants enjoy less pleasures than on the eastern and northern continent, but its great advantage is that it is the only place where Buddhas appear.²

Its shape resembles an inverted triangle. India lies on the southern half of Jambudvīpa and to the north of it lies Mount *Daisessen* (*Himālaya*), and to the north of the latter lies Mount *Kōzuisen*. In between these two mountains lies the sacred lake *Anavatapta*.³

The continents to the north, east and west are imaginary, so by implication it follows that Japan too, which was of course unknown to the Indians, must lie in Jambudvīpa. In Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Jinnō Shōtōki*, a work completed in 1339,⁴ this implication is made explicit: *Therefore, this country [i.e. Japan] lies in the ocean to the northeast of both India and China*.⁵ In its introduction the *Jinnō shōtōki* displays a considerable erudition in matters of traditional Buddhist geography, for it gives a fairly detailed description of the known world, largely based on Chinese sources, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike.

Traditional Chinese world view

Already in the anonymous *Er'ya*, a Chinese dictionary compiled before the

beginning of this era, we find the following definition:

*The nine eastern barbarians, the eight northern barbarians, the seven western barbarians and the six southern barbarians we call the four seas.*⁶

Hence we know that the Chinese called the areas surrounding their own living sphere the four seas. The word "sea" (*hai*) does not seem to really mean "sea" but rather dark. Beyond these regions lie still less charted areas which are referred to as the *four wilds* or the *great wild*.

Ancient and medieval Chinese maps do not deign to include Japan, or, for that matter, any other of the peripheral countries. Even in maps dating from the Song period, Japanese toponyms are scattered over the "Eastern Sea", without being attached to any clearly defined islands. A Chinese cartographer's sole intention was to illustrate the history and present state of the Chinese culture area. As a result Koreans used to add Korea and Japan on Chinese maps that were transmitted in Korea.⁷

The Japanese adaptation

Making reference to the imported world-views the Japanese endeavoured to position themselves within this wider context. We do not find any explicit reference to Japan in the Buddhist Scriptures, but in the *Ninnōgyō han'ya kyō*,⁸ a scripture translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva (344-413 or 350-409), we find the expression *zokusan'ō*, which we may well translate as "petty kings". The term originally denotes the multitude of petty rulers as opposed to the universal sovereign, the *Cakravartin*. The latter Indian term, which literally means the "wheel-turner", is an epithet of the Buddha, who was sent to Earth to "set the wheel of the Dharma [i.e. Buddha's Teaching] in motion". The term "petty king" did not in any way denote the ruler of Japan, but when the Japanese were confronted with the existence of vast empires or areas such as the Indian subcontinent or China, it seemed only appropriate to refer to themselves as a petty kingdom. Moreover, *Zokusan* literally means *the scattering of millet seeds*, so the expression seemed eminently fit for describing the actual shape of the Japanese archipelago.

In medieval Japanese writings we often come across the term *henchi zokusan* or *zokusan hendo*, denoting Japan.⁹ It literally means: *petty kingdom on the periphery*. It illustrates how the Japanese perceived their own country as a small kingdom located on the periphery of Jambudvīpa. It is unclear, just when this association of Japan and *henchi zokusan* was first made. Japanese awareness of the smallness of their own country did certainly exist as early as the 12th century. In the eleventh chapter of the *Konjaku monogatari shū*, a collection completed in the first half of the twelfth century, we read:

*As the Prince of only a small country, I spread the wonderful message and expounded the teaching of the One Vehicle in the places where there was no Dharma.*¹⁰

It is typical of a petty kingdom that its people are base and stupid. In the sixth chapter of the *Ōkagami* we read:

His heart being righteous and upright, and a countenance too good for a small

*country of sycophants.*¹¹

In Kamo no Chōmei's collection of essays on tanka poetics, entitled *Mumyōshō*, the author scorns the Japanese for their conventionalism in matters of style, in contrast to the Chinese:

*Because this country is small and its people have stupid minds, they keep everything as it used to be in days bygone.*¹²

Although "stupidity" in this context has of course a religious meaning, the feeling of ignorance must have been reinforced even by the lack of mastery of the language of the Holy Scripture, viz. Chinese. Even among the learned monks that traveled to China, only very few had a sufficient mastery of spoken Chinese so as to be able to communicate with their Chinese teachers.¹³

The idea of *zokusan hendo*, a petty kingdom on the periphery, is furthermore often associated with the *Mappō* idea. The age of *Mappō*, viz. the degenerate Dharma, was to set in two thousand years after Buddha's Parinirvāṇa. According to contemporaneous computation this corresponded to the seventh year of Eijō, the year 1052 of our era. In the *Gumei hosshin shū*, written by Gedatsubō Jōkei (1155-1213), we read the following passage:

*Born in between two Buddhas, without the direct and indirect causes (necessary) for emancipation and liberation, I live in the small country of Fusang.*¹⁴

The combination of being born in an age of degeneration and in a peripheral land is the worst possible scenario for someone who would aspire to reach liberation.

Gradually, however, the Japanese start to reappraise their small country. Although it is admittedly small, it enjoys the protection of the *Kami*, the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. In this context *Kami* have not to be thought of as antithetical to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. All three have rather to be taken as one group, the *Kami* being reincarnations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as is characteristic of the syncretism that is known as *Honji suijaku*. According to this theory, the *Kami* are avatars of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, adapted to Japan.

By elaborating this theory of coalescing *Kami* and Buddhas (*Shinbutsu shūgō*), Japan could after all secure the status of a land that enjoyed the protection of the Buddhas, a Buddha Land, and so it could join the group of Buddhist lands, along with India and China.

The idea of *henchi zokusan* was consequently substituted by the idea of *Sangoku* (*Tenjiku*, *Shintan* and *Honchō*), literally *three countries*, meaning India, China and Japan, which has an old history too. The question is whether its origin is doctrinal or rather popular. It must of necessity be of Japanese origin. I do not know where the idea appeared explicitly for the first time, but one of the first instances is believed to be Dōgen's (1200-1253) *Shōbōgenzō*. In this work, completed around 1253, the master says:

*After the transmission from the master Nāgārjuna to his disciple Kāṇadeva, in all periods and all regions in the three countries, there have been many Buddhists, but they have not grasped the truth as Nāgārjuna and Kāṇadeva did.*¹⁵

The idea is very conspicuous in the *Konjaku monogatari shū*, a collection of

wonderful stories which are divided in the sections India, China and Japan. About the motives for compiling this collection of stories (*setsuwa*), we may agree with Bernard Frank, who says that Buddhist preachers had a great need to illustrate their sermons with anecdotes. They naturally found these in the Buddhist Scriptures, but they all referred to a fabulous India or a distant China. Clearly there also was a need for stories that played much closer to home and so anecdotes illustrating the efficacy of the Buddha's teaching in Japan were made up and used. These anecdotes had the advantage of referring to persons and places that were not too far away in time or distance and thus carried the illusion of verifiability.¹⁶ By the same token they were living proof that Japan too was a country that enjoyed the protection of the Buddhas.

This idea of *Sangoku* redeemed Japan from its miserable position on the periphery. Buddhist learned monks were aware of this possibility and they started writing "international" histories of Buddhism in the three countries. Eminent examples of this kind of historiography are *Sangoku buppō dentsū engi* (1311) by Gyōnen, *Sangoku meishō ryakki* (1274) by Shōchō and *Sangoku denki* (1431) by Gentō. By emphasizing this juxtaposition of three Buddhist lands, these monks claimed that Japan too was a Buddhist country.

Gradually, the term *Sangoku* lost its explicit religious overtones and evolved to mean the known world, or the civilized world. This went hand in hand with the secularization of Japanese society from the 16th century onwards, when Buddhism lost its overwhelming grip on Japanese spiritual and social life. Bernard Frank summarizes it poignantly:

*Les "Trois Pays", (...) incarnaient aux yeux des Japonais de ce temps les trois courants civilisateurs à partir desquels le monde qui les entourait s'était constitué: celui de la religion bouddhique, celui de la culture du continent et celui de la tradition nationale. C'est dire que tout ouvrage qui prétendait, en quelque domaine que ce fût, résumer l'essentiel de l'expérience des trois pays, s'affirmait de ce fait même, comme une manière d'encyclopédie.*¹⁷

To be sure, India was very vague and Japanese had no first-hand information about it:

*L'Inde était pour les Japonais la sainte terre du Buddha et n'était rien d'autre. Il n'est pas exagéré de dire que, durant des siècles, ils ne l'ont point connue, mais rîvée.*¹⁸

Indeed India gradually faded from the Japanese consciousness and was eventually supplanted by Korea, so that another triad became the epitome of the civilized world: China, Korea and Japan. One of the first to use this new combination was Yamaga Sokō (1622-1685). He stated that China and Japan were at the centre of the world. Prof. Unno Kazutaka has pointed out that Sokō probably had this idea from the world map of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), the Italian Jesuit active in China at the end of the Ming dynasty. In order to please the Chinese, who saw themselves at the centre of the world, Ricci had modified the traditional European practice in placing the Pacific at the centre. Thus the new geographical knowledge that was brought to the East, gradually changed the way the Japanese saw the world and their position

in it.¹⁹

Buddhist universes

At an early stage, Mahāyāna Buddhism witnessed the development of the idea that there are many Buddhas who exist at the same time, each in their own Buddha land. Jambudvīpa is located in the Sahāloka, which is Śākyamuni's Buddha land. It is full of suffering and is therefore soiled, defiled. Most other Buddha lands are utopian worlds, called Pure lands. One of these pure lands was Sukhāvatī, the realm of the Buddha Amida (Amitābha), located to the west of our universe. Among the followers of Amidism, as this faith is called, this Western Paradise was the ideal place for rebirth. It was not the final destination, but if one could be reborn there, ultimate liberation was virtually assured. Devotion for Amida and his paradise is believed to have arisen in northwestern India during the second century of our era. The means to gain rebirth in the Western Paradise were easy enough: he who invokes in earnest the name of the Buddha Amida, will, at the hour of death, be met by Amida and led into his Paradise. Belief that this would indeed happen was based on the forty-eight vows taken by the Bodhisattva Dharmākara in a distant past. He vowed that, unless these vows were fulfilled he would forego ultimate Buddhahood. Now, this Bodhisattva Dharmākara has become the Buddha Amida, residing in the Western Paradise. Which, by inference, means that the vows have been fulfilled. Especially the eighteenth vow is important, for it vouches rebirth in Western Paradise to all those invoking Amida's name.

In Japan Amida devotion gained popularity from the middle of the eighth century onwards, especially within the context of worship for the salvation of the deceased. In the doctrine of Saichō, known as Tendai Buddhism, the invocation of Amida (*nenbutsu*) played a considerable role too. However, it was only in the Kamakura period that it became a major sectarian movement, especially under the impulse of Hōnen (1133-1212). He believed that in his time, mankind had become so degenerate that the religious methods and practices of traditional Buddhism were totally inadequate for seeking salvation. Complete surrender to the boundless mercy of Amida was the only way out.

Amidism was in a sense admittance of defeat. It admitted that in this world, in this country, in this degenerate age nothing could be done to further the cause of liberation. One had to wait for rebirth in the Western Paradise. To gain this rebirth, the sole practice of invoking the Buddha Amida (*senju nenbutsu*) sufficed. This was a particularly simple solution, and is therefore called "the path of easy practice" (*igyōdō*). The old sects advocated "the path of hard practice" (*nangyōdō*), which is better known as "the method of the holy path" (*shōdōmon*). This was of course the method espoused by the old Nara-sects. They felt directly challenged by Hōnen's doctrine and went into the counter-attack, on the political as well as the doctrinal level. Their soteriological viewpoint was less defeatist and they did not shift all their hopes to the Western Paradise. Religious practice in this world was after all meaningful.

Since Buddhism in the age of degeneration could not be the holy path, Hōnen

contended it could not be the exclusive property of a monastic elite (*shukke*), but had to include all living beings. As enlightenment by virtue of one's own merits (*jiriki*) was *a priori* impossible, Hōnen's Pure Land doctrine denied the very *raison d'être* of monasticism. This contention aimed at the very heart of the Eight Sects (*hasshū*) system, which was inextricably interwoven with the *ritsuryō* state. The Eight Sects were the six old sects of Nara and the two established after the capital was moved to *Heian-kyō* (Kyōto). In 1175 Hōnen left Mount Hiei, abandoning the traditional holy path (*shōdōmon*) and taking refuge in the sole practice of the nenbutsu.

The consciousness and experience of crisis was all-pervasive at the end of the Heian-period. Yet there was a difference in appraisal between the proponents of the *nenbutsu* teaching and traditional Nara sects. Surely, Nara sects, being heavily influenced by *Shingon*, were familiar with Kūkai's writings on the Three Ages of Buddhism. The concept was also abundantly expounded in the basic scriptures of *Hossō* and *Sanron*. Moreover, if the Nara clergy wanted to officiate at court (*kushō*) or to be promoted to the government-appointed position of Controller of the priesthood (*sōgō*), they had to be familiar with Tendai writings that included passages on the Three Ages.²⁰ Consequently, the Nara clergy did have a scholarly grasp of *Mappō*, but they lacked the sense of urgency and despair that the proponents of Pure Land doctrine and *Nenbutsu* shared. For Hōnen, degeneration was irreversible and he was resigned to his fate. *Nanto* Buddhism²¹ admitted that humankind was in dire straits, but it did not relinquish its traditional belief in the merits of learning, monastic discipline and religious practice, i.e. the hard way to enlightenment (*nangyōdō*). It did seek however to accommodate itself to the basic tenets of Pure Land doctrine by incorporating them into its doctrinal framework, by the same token trying to eliminate all grounds for existence of a separate sect of Pure Land doctrine. In this search for adjustment, the learned monk Gedatsubō Jōkei played a major role. In contrast to Hōnen, who had given up on this world as a possible platform for working towards the final goal of salvation, Jōkei was stubbornly looking for different approaches that gave at least some meaning to one's existence in this world. Although we are living in an age of degeneration, in a period between two Buddhas, it is not all despair. Surely, one could turn to another universe, in particular to the Western Paradise, where Amida resided, and set all one's hopes on rebirth in that universe, but he (Jōkei) looked for something closer to home. There were a few alternatives, that were not as remote from this world as Amida's paradise. First of all, there was Śākyamuni, who had indeed entered nirvāṇa, but had at least left us his teachings and his relics. There was the future Buddha, Maitreya, who was waiting in the wings so to speak, and readying himself for his final rebirth. And last but not least, there was Avalokiteśvara, who resided in a realm which was the first gate to the Western Paradise, but much closer to our world. In putting forward these alternatives, Jōkei naturally had to criticize the biased approach of Hōnen. Consequently, a good deal of his writings are criticism of the *Nenbutsu* doctrine.

Jōkei left numerous writings ranging from theoretical treatises on *Hossō* doctrine and practical instructions about monastic life to petitions and hymns. Most of his work was composed after his retirement to the mountain temples Kasagidera and

Kaijusenji. We will limit ourselves to an analysis of a few of his fundamental ideas, especially with regards to the Pure Land doctrine.

One of his most famous writings is of a political nature. In 1205 he composed a petition directed to the throne pressing for punishment of Hōnen and his followers: the *Kōfukuji sōjō*.²² It will be recalled that already in 1204 the priests of Mount Hiei had joined in signing a petition to the chief abbot Shinjō demanding that he put an end to the doctrine of the sole practice of invoking the Buddha Amida, preached by Hōnen. The ill-feeling towards the new movement did not subside. Especially the priests of Kōfukuji, the head temple of the Hossō sect in Nara, were incensed at the direction taken by Hōnen. They presented the petition to the throne, condemning Hōnen and his followers in the strongest terms.

In the second point Jōkei attacks the exclusiveness of the *Senju Nenbutsu*, which appears to imply that the light of Amitābha would only shine forth upon those solely invoking his name:

If one practices exclusively the other religious exercises and does not invoke Amitābha's name, he may indeed be excluded from the light of His protection, but if someone wishes rebirth in the Western Paradise and also invokes Amitābha's name, why should other religious exercises shut off the light of His compassion?

Evidently it is not Nenbutsu as such which is to be condemned, but the exclusionism of Hōnen's doctrine, for this also implies that the various doctrines taught by Śākyamuni are discarded, although it is the latter who has given humanity the teaching about the Pure Land (third point).

The collision between exclusionism and catholicism is perhaps most conspicuous in the fifth point, dealing with the Shintō gods. The followers of Hōnen contend that those who pray to the Shintō gods will fall into hell. Yet, the eminent monks of ancient times all have honoured the Shintō deities as incarnations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (*gonge suijaku*). Recognizing the validity of worship to the Shintō gods, the native gods of Japan, meant, at least by implication, that Japan too had something to offer to one who sought salvation. Denying this was confirming that Japan was peripheral to the extent that it had no redeeming elements at all.

In the eighth point Jōkei attacks the neglect of discipline:

The Senju contends: go and backgammon do not go against the sole practice of Nenbutsu, relations with women and eating of meat do not prevent rebirth in the Western Paradise. In the age of degeneration, a person who abides by the precepts is like a tiger in the market place, he is frightening, he is repulsive.

Jōkei was intelligent enough to understand that mere condemnation was not enough to stem the tide of the easy path (*igyōdō*). He had to substitute an alternative and he found it in Śākyamuni, the original teacher (*honshi*). In a sense his life at Kasagidera and Kaijusenji may be described as a continuous effort to restore a community of the True Dharma as he conceived it to have existed in Śākyamuni's time. Worship of Śākyamuni (*Shaka shinkō*) had a long history, but it had never been predominant. Its popularity rose dramatically after Chōnen traveled to China (983-986) and brought back a sandalwood image of Śākyamuni which was installed

in the Seikaji temple in Saga (Kyōto)²³ and venerated as a miraculous image that had come all the way from India via China to Japan. Copies of this image were and still are to be found in numerous temples. Since the original image is now preserved in the Seiryōji, all copies made in the same style are referred to as Seiryōji style.²⁴ Jōkei had a great veneration for Śākyamuni:

*Although all Buddhas in the past, the present and the future are equally merciful, the mercy of the historic Buddha is particularly vast.*²⁵

The weakness of Śākyamuni worship and invocation lies in the fact that he has already entered nirvāṇa. Jōkei therefore had to look for a supplementary object of worship, which he readily found in the relics of Śākyamuni. Relics were certainly a means to channel and intensify the feeling of longing for Śākyamuni's time, and worshipping them meant accumulation of merits, yet they did not bring salvation per se. A much better alternative therefore was the worship of Maitreya (Miroku), the next Buddha to come. He could be worshipped under two different guises: 1° as the next Buddha, thus bringing a chiliastic dimension into the worship, or 2° as the Bodhisattva at present residing in the Tuṣita (Tosotsu) heaven, thus offering a pendant for rebirth in the Western Paradise of Amitābha.

In the Shinyōshō, a work for the non-specialist probably written around 1196,²⁶ we read:

Question: What Buddha should we invoke?

Answer: Invoke the Maitreya Buddha. When your life will end, you will gain rebirth in his Tuṣita heaven? This is my wish.

Question: Most teachings praise Amitābha. In his great vow Amitābha has pledged to save the Sahāloka. The samādhi of the Nenbutsu takes only this Buddha as object? Why not invoke him?

*Answer: The powers of the Buddhas in the three ages are equal. In accordance with everyone's capacity they predict when one will become a Buddha, and there is no room for contradicting (their prediction). So, Maitreya is the direct successor of the Great Teacher (Śākyamuni), the preceptor of the future. He who hears one verse on the Dharma taught by Him, is assured to meet him when he descends on earth, and will be able to attain the stage of no receding. The Buddha has foretold that everyone in the age of degeneration of the Dharma, whether he observes the precepts or breaks them, whether he has precepts or not, will attain emancipation at the gathering under the dragon-flower tree. Maitreya himself says: I received from the Great Master Śākyamuni the prediction that I will not forsake even those who do not invoke me, let alone those who pray to me.*²⁷

It is striking that Jōkei puts great emphasis on the prediction (vyākaraṇa) of Śākyamuni vis-à-vis Maitreya, in which he seems to have more trust than in Amitābha's vow (praṇidhāna). This is an indirect confirmation of the pre-eminence of Śākyamuni over Amitābha.

Amidists might object that the Tuṣita heaven is still situated in the Realm of

Desire (*kāmadhātu*), while Amitābha's Pure Land lies beyond the Three Realms. However, this was a drawback rather than an advantage, since, according to Jōkei, this implied that rebirth in the Pure Land was unattainable for women, persons lacking the good roots (*kuṣālamūla*), Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas. The Tuṣita heaven on the contrary is accessible to even the most deluded and benighted living beings. For all the similarities that existed between the Amida and the Miroku faiths, they had a different appreciation of the attainability of the goal. By the end of the Heian period, Amidists grew more and more pessimistic concerning human nature and the ability to attain salvation. The Miroku devotees were more concerned about the condition of the world and the preservation of institutions. Amidists stressed the pessimistic aspects of the Mappō doctrine, whereas worshippers of Miroku tended to look to the promise inherent in the *kalpa* revolution, of which the period of Mappō²⁸ was an integral part.

In 1208 Jōkei moved to the Kaijusenji, a temple dedicated to the worship of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (*Kannon Bosatsu*). This had the effect of a certain shift of focus from Miroku to Kannon as the object of his worship. When he moved into it, this temple, which had been built by Ryōben and was hitherto known as Kannonji, was in a dilapidated state. Jōkei took upon himself its reconstruction and refurbishing and engaged in an intense worship of Kannon.

In the *Busshari Kannon daishi hotsugammon* he states that by worshipping the relics of Śākyamuni we reap the fruit of progress in the present life, and by chanting the dhāraṇī of Kannon, we eradicate the four grievous sins of monks and nuns (*pārājika*) and after death attain rebirth in Fudaraku (Sanskrit: Potalaka):

*He who worships Śākyamuni's relics, will after death dwell in great joy and his vow will be realized; he who intones the dhāraṇī of Kannon, will after death be reborn in Fudaraku.*²⁹

Fudaraku is the name of a mountain located on the southern coast of India. It is here that Kannon is supposed to reside. Whereas he tended to stress the identity between Śākyamuni and Maitreya in the period that he stayed in the Kasagidera, he seems to have shifted his focus to an equation between Śākyamuni and Avalokiteśvara. His *Kannon kōshiki* (Ceremonial in Praise of Kannon, 1209) even takes him a step further:

*The realm of Śākyamuni is not much different from the Pure Land and the Tuṣita heaven. How much more then are the realms of Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara identical?*³⁰

In the colophon to this text he adds: *Śākyamuni, Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara are the three worthies*, thus suggesting equality between the three. Most remarkable is the fact that even Amitābha is not excluded. All this seems to point to at least an equivalence between Śākyamuni, Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara and Amitābha. Yet he drew the line short of the latter Buddha. He thought that for belief in Amitābha, the three minds (*sanshin*) and the four spiritual practices (*shishu*) were a prerequisite, so he preferred to pray for rebirth on Mount Potalaka, which was the first gate to the Pure Land. In the *Shinyōshō* he states:

Karmic causes for rebirth in Paradise are diverse, in accordance with innate

*capacity. Whether one finds the nectar will depend to a great extent on supernatural intervention (myōga). Consequently, in the age of degeneration there are Maitreya and Amitābha for Buddhas. Hokke and Hannya for sūtras, Nenbutsu and sūtra recitation for religious practice, Pure Land and Tūṣita for places of rebirth. They are equivalent to one another for eight or nine tenths, but about the remainder I am not sure.*³¹

This was obviously directed against Senju Nenbutsu, which had only one cure for all. Consequently, which way one would be saved depended on the supernatural intervention of the Buddhas. In a sense, this left more initiative to the omnipotent Buddhas than Amidism, which stuck rigorously to one single way. Leaving the choice had even more of a *tariki* approach.

A peripheral, small country in Jambudvīpa, the Western Paradise, the Tūṣita Heaven or Mount Potalaka: these are the alternatives as the place where to venture upon the quest for enlightenment and liberation. In the Amidist scheme of things, Śākyamuni, the historic Buddha, is all but eclipsed by Amida. Those who did not forfeit this world completely as a place to seek liberation, tended to return to Śākyamuni, as we have demonstrated was the case with Jōkei.

Japan shifts to the centre.

Śākyamuni was also lionized by Nichiren, probably Amidism's most implacable enemy. Nichiren (1222-1282) taught that all Buddhist scriptures are nothing more than a preparation to the crowning achievement: the Scripture of the Lotus Sūtra. In it the Buddha predicts that the Lotus of the True Law will blossom in the latter days of the Dharma. This is the period in the history of the Buddha's Dharma known as Mappō. Already Śākyamuni Buddha himself had predicted the downhill curve the history of his own teaching would describe. The period of the Right Dharma (*Shōbō*) starts at the demise of the Buddha and lasts one thousand years. It is the time when people have the right idea about the Dharma and practice it correctly. The second period, which also lasts a thousand years, is called Zōbō, the counterfeit Dharma. During its first five hundred years people's practice of Buddhism is formally correct. They build splendid temples and pagodas. After those two basically positive millennia the spirit of Buddhism disappears, which entails the occurrence of all kinds of disasters, all of them the consequence of ignorance and disbelief. The best method to practice and propagate the Dharma in these degenerate times is expounded in the Lotus Sūtra. The choice of his name Nichiren, Sun-Lotus, was based on this belief. It refers to a passage in the Lotus Sūtra:

*As the bright light of the sun and the moon can clear away all darkness and obscurity, so he who can keep to this sūtra, going through the world, can lighten the darkness of all beings.*³²

Darkness there was in his time. Plagues, drought, political instability, earthquakes and ominous astrological phenomena such as sun eclipses and the passage of a comet. The years 1258 and 1260 were particularly bad. Hunger and disease raged through Kamakura and the country, but Buddhism flourished. The ceremonies were attended by large numbers of people, and the *Ritsu* sect preached a kind of Buddhism

where social commitment was a central tenet. For Nichiren, however, who strongly believed that Japan was a chosen country, the dire straits the country had fallen into, were proof that something was wrong with the practice of Buddhism. He waited full of hope for the advent of a ruler who, as a true Bodhisattva, would bring his people the true Buddha's teaching, thereby putting an end to the disasters that were being visited upon the country. At that time he wrote the treatise *Risshō ankoku ron*. It is construed as a dialogue between a Buddhist priest and a layman, to whom the priest teaches the true doctrine (*risshō*), which must lead to peace in the land (*ankoku*).

Never before or after have religion and the state been so intensely linked as in the teaching of Nichiren. Nichiren believed that Buddhism had to be purified of false sects who delude the masses. Especially Amidism was the target of his fierce criticism, which he called an "heretical evil teaching and slander of Buddhism".³³

Because of his unbending attitude and relentless attacks on other sects, Nichiren became the victim of prosecution and was eventually banished, first to the peninsula of Izu, and later to the island Sado. He believed that the Lotus Sūtra described his own situation and this drew him into an irreversible spiral which would lead to his identifying himself with a Bodhisattva of the Sūtra. Exiled in Sado he started wondering whether he was not the Jōgyō Bosatsu (*Viśiṣṭacāritra Bodhisattva*), since everything in his life seemed to point in that direction. In promoting himself in that way, he also upgraded his ambitions: now he wanted to save all living beings in the future myriads. In his *Kaimokushō* (Opening the eyes), he deals with the role of Confucianism, Hinduism, Hinayāna Buddhism and all other teachings as preparatory stages leading to the true teaching of Buddha as it is expounded in the second part of the Lotus Sūtra, and lived by himself:

*When the country will fall prey to all these troubles, the saints Viśiṣṭacāritra and others will come down, they will establish the three dogmas of the doctrine of the original state (fundamental object of veneration, the range of radiance and the title) and in the whole of Japan, they will propagate the Sūtra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma, no doubt about that.*³⁴

Nichiren saw himself as the central figure of a Grand Design, in which Japan too played a central role. In this respect he is often called unique among the major thinkers of medieval Japan. However, the Jinnō shōtōki too, in its own way takes issue with the traditional view of Japan as an inferior country and proceeds to demonstrate its uniqueness. Its author is keen to point out that *although China is said to be a large country, compared to India it is a small country on the periphery*.³⁵ His extensive reference to Buddhist scriptures indicates the degree to which he is indebted to the Buddhist world view. Yet, his stress on the uniqueness of Japan, as epitomized in the unbroken imperial succession, makes his work a prefiguration of the National Learning (*Kokugaku*), which was to become so influential in the latter half of the Edo period.

Notes

- 1 Daizōkyō Kankōkai, ed., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, 85 vols., Tōkyō, Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924-1932 (hereafter cited as Daizōkyō), vol. XXIX, N° 1558, p. 57 ff.
- 2 Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, Tōkyō, Tōkyō Shoseki, 1975, p. 1216, s. v. Enbudai.
For the Japanese in medieval times the single most important source for the Indian world view was probably the *Ōyōshō*: Daizōkyō vol. LXXXIV, N° 2682 p. 33a, 35a, 60b, 76b. Konjaku ch. I, 1).
- 3 For a detailed analysis of the world view in Asian traditional cultures, see Unno Kazutaka, *Chizu no shiwa*, Tōkyō, Yūshōdō Press Co., Ltd., 1985, pp. 173-226, esp. p. 177 ff.
- 4 H. Paul Varley transl., *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns: Jinnō Shōtōki of Kitabatake Chikafusa*, translated by H. Paul Varley, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 43.
- 5 Iwasa Masashi et al. eds., *Jinnō shōtōki, Masu kagami: Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (hereafter cited as NKBT), vol. LXXXVII, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1965, p. 45. See also Varley, o. c. p. 55.
- 6 Unno Kazutaka, *Chizu no shiwa*, p. 196 ff.
- 7 See Unno; *Chizu no shiwa*, p. 211 ff, about the Chinese view of Japan.
- 8 Daizōkyō vol. VIII, N° 245, p. 827b. A very similar term *zokusan shō*, lit. small kings (of countries small) as scattered millet seeds is encountered in the *Hōkō han'ya kyō*, Daizōkyō VIII N° 221, p. 100c and p. 109b, a scripture translated into Chinese in the third century.
- 9 For an extensive overview of Japanese sources where this term is used, see Unno Kazutaka, *Zokusan hendo to Dainihonkoku: chūsei nihonjin no kokudo-kan*, in: *Osaka Meijō joshi tanki daigaku kiyō* II (1987), offprint 17 pp.
- 10 Yamada Yoshio et al. eds., *Konjaku monogatari shū: Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (hereafter cited as NKBT), vol. XXIV, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1961, p. 57. Also: Mabuchi Kazuo et al. eds., *Konjaku monogatari shū: Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (hereafter cited as NKBTZ) vol. XXI, Tōkyō, Shōgakukan, 1971, p. 72.
Earlier in the same story we find the statement by a Korean monk addressed to the young Shōtoku Taishi: *Blessed is Avalokiteśvara, I will transmit the lamp of the Dharma to the petty king of the East*. NKBT vol. XXIV, p. 53. Also: NKBTZ vol. XXI, p. 65.
- 11 Matsumura Hiroji ed., *Ōkagami*: NKBT vol. XXI, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1960, p. 279. Also: Tachibana Kenji ed., *Ōkagami*: NKBTZ vol. XX, Tōkyō, Shōgakukan, 1974, p. 417.
- 12 Hisamatsu Sen'ichi & Nishio Minoru eds., *Karon shū Nōgaku ronshū*: NKBT vol. LXV, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1961, p. 84, and p. 252 n. 109.
- 13 Watanabe Shōkō. *Nihon no bukkyō* (Iwanami shinsho N° 299), Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1958, pp. 17-18.
- 14 Kamata Shigeo & Tanaka Hisao eds., *Kamakura Kyū-bukkyō: Nihon Shisō Taikei* (hereafter cited as NST), vol. XV, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1974 p. 15 and p. 306.
Fusang is an elegant term for Japan of Chinese origin.
- 15 Nishio Minoru et al., eds., *Shōbōgenzō, Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*: NKBT vol. LXXXI, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1966, p. 127. Also: Terada Tōru & Mizuno Yaoko eds., *Dōgen*: NST Vol. XII, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1970, p. 59-60. Translation mine.
For another translation see also Kōsen Nishiyama & John Stevens et al., transl. *A Complete Translation of Dōgen Zenji's Shōbōgenzō (The Eye and Treasury of the True Law)*, 4 vols., Sendai, Daihokkai-kaku Publishing Co. & Tōkyō, Nakayama Shobō, 1975-1983, vol. IV, p. 131.
- 16 Bernard Frank, *Histoires qui sont maintenant du passé* (Konjaku monogatari shū). Traduction, préface et commentaires de Bernard Frank. Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p. 11 ff.
- 17 Frank, *Histoires qui sont maintenant du passé*, p. 13.
- 18 Idem, p. 14.
- 19 Unno, *Zokusan hendo to Dainihonkoku*, p. 13.
- 20 See Nodomi Jōten, *Kyū-bukkyō ni okeru fukko shisō*, in: *Nippon bukkyō gakkai nenpō* XXXIV (1969), p. 21.
- 21 *Nanto*, means Southern Capital, i.e. the old capital Nara, as opposed to *Heian-kyō*. Nanto Buddhism then denotes the more traditionalist strand of Buddhism upheld by the traditional sects of Nara.

- 22 See Kamata & Tanaka eds., *Kamakura kyū-bukkyō*: NST vol. XV, p. 31 ff. and p. 312 ff.
- 23 See e.g. Sawa Ryūken, *Butsuzō zuten*, Tōkyō, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1962, p. 19.
- 24 Ishida Yoshito, *Kyū-bukkyō no chūseiteki tenkai*, in: Akamatsu Toshihide ed. *Nihon bukkyō shi: (vol. II) chūsei-hen*, Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 1967, p. 297.
- 25 Kamata & Tanaka eds., *Kamakura kyū-bukkyō*: NST vol. XV, p. 312.
- 26 Fukihara Shōshin, *Gedatsu shōnin to sono nenbutsu* in: *Nippon bukkyō gakkai nempō XXXIV* (1969), p. 113.
- 27 Kasagi Shamon Jōkei, *Shinyōshō*, in: *Nihon daizōkyō: Hossō-shū shōso* (hereafter cited as *Nihon daizōkyō*), *Nihon daizōkyō hensankai* ed. vol. I, Tōkyō, 1915, p. 702.
- 28 Goodwin Janet, *The worship of Miroku in Japan*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, 1977, p. 170-171.
- 29 *Gedatsu shōnin shōshōshū*, in: *Nihon daizōkyō*, vol. II, p. 18.
- 30 NARITA Jōkan, *Kamakura jidai ni okeru Nanto bukkyō no kōkō*, in: *Nihon bukkyō gakkai nempō XXIII* (1958), p. 247.
- 31 Kasagi Shamon Jōkei, *Shinyōshō in: Nihon daizōkyō*, vol. I, p. 711.
- 32 Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1976, p. XXI.
- 33 Laurel R. Rodd, *Nichiren: a Biography* (Occasional Papers N° 11), Arizona, Arizona State University, 1978, p. 21.
- 34 For a French translation see Gaston Renondeau, *Le Bouddhisme japonais: textes fondamentaux de quatre grands moines de Kamakura*, préface et traduction française de G. Renondeau, (Spiritualités vivantes: collections publiées sous la direction de Jean Herbert, Série Bouddhisme) Paris, Editions Albin Michel, 1965, p. 315.
- 35 NKBT, vol. LXXXVII, p. 44. See also Varley, o.c. p. 55.

粟散辺土から仏国へと変容した日本

ウィリー・ヴァンドゥワラ

小論は、中世日本仏教界に於ける世界観の幾つの特徴を考察することを試みたものである。地上地理観と宇宙地理観とを区別する一方、又他方双方が密接な関係にあることを論証する。

大陸文化の伝来によって、日本人は二つの異なった文脈^{コンテキスト}と接触したのである。その一つは、中国の世界観、とりわけ中国を中心にすえた中華的地理観であり、もう一つは、仏典に基づいた宗教的世界観であった。後者は、時空の二次元に於いて最も広大無辺なものであり、綿密な宇宙論といっても過言ではない。これらの大陸伝来の世界観を背景に日本人は、日本をその広大なコンテキストの中へ位置づけた時、小国という意味合いでしばしば「辺地粟散」又は「粟散辺土」という表現を日本のことにあてはめたのである。更に、辺土という観念は、しばしば末法思想と結び付けられたのである。辺土に、そして末法時代に生まれるという、悪条件の重なった境遇にあっては、解脱への期待も無に等しい。

一方、日本人の自分の住んでいる小国に対する評価も時代と共に変わっていく。日本は小国ながら神仏の加護を受けている国であるとし、その結果、辺地粟散どころか、天竺(印度)と晨旦(中国)と並んで仏法三国に列するものと見なされるに至った。

専修念仏をとらえた法然等と八宗の高僧との葛藤は、娑婆と浄土に対する評価の差異を反映しているように思われる。専修念仏者が阿弥陀の浄土への往生へ全ての期待を寄せているのに対して、南都仏教を代表する高僧貞慶は、娑婆又は娑婆に近い世界の価値も認め

たのであった。従って、貞慶は、この穢土にその教えを遺して入滅した釈迦、又はその仏舎利に対する信仰が厚かった。更に、弥勒及び観音への帰依も唱道したのである。しかし、念仏をもっとも強烈に否定し、釈迦に対する帰依をもっとも主張したのは、日蓮である。自分を常行菩薩と同一視した日蓮は、日本こそ法華經の真理を広めるべき恵まれた地と見なしたのである。